



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Protecting Kids from Choking, Suffocation and Strangulation

Safe Kids Kansas offers airway safety tips

Airway obstruction — choking, suffocation or strangulation — is the leading cause of accidental death in Kansas children ages 14 and under. Every year, in the United States, more than 700 children die from accidental suffocation or strangulation and nearly 170 die from foreign-body airway obstruction — choking on food, toy parts or other small objects. In addition, each year, an estimated 900 suspected Sudden Infant Death Syndrome cases are actually cases of suffocation by soft bedding.

“Small children have small airways,” says Jan Stegelman, Safe Kids Kansas coordinator. “It doesn’t take much to choke them, and young kids are always putting small objects in their mouths.” Since most choking incidents in children involve food, parents and caregivers should avoid giving small, round foods such as hot dogs, candies, nuts, grapes, carrots and popcorn to children under age 3. Other common choking hazards include coins, small balls and balloons.

“Literally get down on your hands and knees and crawl around. You’ll be surprised at how much your child can reach and pick up,” says Stegelman. “If an object can fit through a standard 1½-inch toilet paper tube or a store-bought small parts tester, don’t let your child play with it.”

Three out of five cases of infant suffocation involve bedding; other suffocation hazards include plastic bags and entrapment in poorly ventilated spaces such as laundry machines, car trunks and toy chests. Babies and toddlers under age 3 are especially vulnerable because they cannot lift their heads or escape from tight places. “There’s no substitute for active supervision to prevent suffocation,” says Stegelman.

In the past 20 years, at least 22 children have been strangled by drawstrings in clothing, mostly as a result of drawstrings getting tangled in playground equipment. Don’t allow drawstrings, hanging jewelry or loose clothing on the playground — and don’t let kids wear bike helmets on the playground, because the straps can get caught on equipment.

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Children can also be strangled in the slats or frames of cribs, bunk beds, strollers, high chairs and other devices. A safe crib has no more than 2 3/8 inches of space between slats, is not placed near a window and does not have anything hanging above it on a string longer than seven inches. Tie window blind cords up out of reach; at least 130 children have been strangled by window covering cords since 1991.

Avoid thick, soft bedding for babies and toddlers. To reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Stegelman says, "Always, always, always lay babies down on their backs to sleep until they can turn themselves over." Kids under 6 should not sleep in the top bunk of a bunk bed, and the bed frame and guardrails should not be more than 3.5 inches apart.

"All parents and caregivers should learn CPR and first aid for airway obstruction," says Stegelman. "Simply put, if your airway is blocked, you are going to die — quickly."

For more information about airway safety, visit www.usa.safekids.org.

Safe Kids Kansas, Inc. is a nonprofit Coalition of 67 statewide organizations and businesses dedicated to preventing accidental injuries to Kansas children ages 0-14. Local coalitions and chapters are located in Allen, Anderson, Atchison, Clay, Dickinson, Doniphan, Douglas, Ellis, Ford, Franklin, Geary, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Leavenworth, Marion, Meade, Mitchell, Montgomery, Nemaha, Osage, Pottawatomie, Republic, Rice, Riley, Saline, Smith, Shawnee, Wabaunsee, Wilson and Woodson Counties, as well as the cities of Chanute, Emporia, Leavenworth, Norton, Pittsburg, the Wichita Area and the Metro Kansas City Area. Safe Kids Kansas a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network of organizations whose mission is to prevent accidental childhood injury.

www.kansassafekids.org

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